Liberals fill in blanks on climate plan; Experts say Conservatives mislead with attacks on carbon price, fuel standard

The Toronto Star

September 27, 2019 Friday

Copyright 2019 Toronto Star Newspapers Limited

Section: NEWS; Pg. A6

Length: 1032 words

Byline: Alex Ballingall Toronto Star

Dateline: OTTAWA

Body

The Liberals are filling in the blanks of their plan to fight climate change as they try to draw a stark contrast with the Conservative party, which continues to attack their environmental record in ways that experts consider misleading.

After canoeing for the cameras on a lake in Sudbury on Thursday, Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau strode to his party's green "climate action" lectern to make the latest in a series of environmental pledges this week. If they form government after the Oct. 21 election, the Liberals say they would extend conservation areas to cover about 25 per cent of Canada's land and water by 2025.

Again choosing to ignore the Greens and New Democrats when discussing climate change, Trudeau challenged Conservative Leader Andrew Scheer to match the Liberal promise to ban single-use plastics "as early as" 2021 and announced he would march with demonstrators demanding climate action in Montreal on Friday - when "climate strikes" are set to be held across the country and around the world.

"The Conservatives are running against climate action. They don't think you need to do anything to fight climate change. And not only is that not going to protect our environment, that is not going to protect our kids' future," Trudeau said.

"It is time for Conservatives to understand that the world is demanding climate leadership."

This week, as world leaders gathered to discuss the climate crisis at the United Nations summit in New York, the Liberals unveiled their new commitment to reduce emissions, first by "exceeding" Canada's target in 2030 - 30 per cent below 2005 levels - and then hitting "net zero" emissions by the middle of the century.

To hit these targets, the Liberals say they would appoint an expert panel to advise the government on five-year plans to slash emissions to levels that will be mandated by law.

The party also pledged it would to cut corporate income taxes in half for clean technology businesses, give interest-free loans and grants for Canadians to retrofit their homes or build new ones that are carbon neutral and pass a law to ensure workers transitioning out of the fossil-fuel sector are supported and retrained for new jobs.

Mark Jaccard, a professor of sustainable energy at Simon Fraser University, said the policy proposals aren't as effective at reducing emissions as the policies already in place - primarily the minimum carbon price the Liberals imposed across Canada this year as well as regulations like the incoming clean fuel standards and the plan to phase out almost all coal-fired power over the coming decade.

In Jaccard's view, these are the "correct essential policies for which you could achieve the 2030 target," but only if the next government makes them stricter after the election. But even though the Liberals haven't yet pledged to do that in this election, Jaccard said, the alternatives presented by the Conservatives - the Liberals' main competitor for power, according to all public polls - "won't really reduce emissions."

The Conservative attack on the Liberal record on climate change argues that policies like the carbon price and clean fuel standards will jack up the cost of living and fail to bring Canada to its 2030 target.

Through the campaign, the Conservatives have repeatedly claimed Liberal policies will drive up the cost of gas by 31 cents per litre, while insisting their own climate plan can reduce emissions without such an impact on the cost of living.

"Canada is falling further and further behind our targets and the cost of living is getting higher and higher," Scheer said Thursday in Montreal.

"The policies that (Trudeau has) announced without any details in the last few days will lead to massive increases in the cost of living," he said.

Experts have pushed back on those assertions about existing climate policies. The party's analysis on the carbon price, for instance, ignores the tax rebates that, by law, must be sent to households in jurisdictions where it was imposed. The Parliamentary Budget Officer (PBO) has concluded these payouts will exceed the cost of the carbon price for 80 per cent of recipients.

The Conservatives also use a PBO study to claim Liberal policies will increase the cost of gas by 31 cents. This year, the office concluded that, to hit Canada's 2030 target, the price would have to rise from $50 per tonne of emissions in 2022 to $102 per tonne - but only if nothing else is done to slash emissions. The Conservatives ignore this context and cite the $102 per tonne price as if it is part of the Liberals' plans - when in fact they have not committed to increasing the price at all beyond $50.

"Carbon policy is getting massacred from an information perspective," said Dave Sawyer, an environmental economist who said the Conservatives have cited his research out of context to bolster their claim that their climate plan will reduce emissions.

Sawyer published a report this summer that concluded the Conservative plan would reduce emissions modestly, but far less than the current Liberal policies they pledge to cancel and replace with new policies Sawyer predicts would be more costly. (The Conservatives responded at the time that Sawyer's study was biased because he supports carbon pricing.)

Dan Woynillowicz, policy director with Clean Energy Canada, said the Conservatives cited his think tank's research on how the clean fuel standard could increase the cost of gas by 5 cents per litre by 2030, but neglected the surrounding context of how the proliferation of cleaner cars and more carbon-efficient home-heating would is expecting to bring overall energy costs down.

"To just cherry-pick one of the costs that is going up and ignore other costs (that) are going down ... ultimately is misleading to Canadians - and a misrepresentation of our work," Woynillowicz said.

Conservative spokesperson Simon Jefferies repeated that gas prices will go up if the Liberals are re-elected.

"His carbon tax punishes moms and dads driving their kids to hockey practice, while doing nothing to fight climate change," he said.

"The Conservative party will be telling voters this entire election campaign exactly how much Justin Trudeau will cost them if he's re-elected."

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Document-Type: COLUMN

Publication-Type: NEWSPAPER

Subject: CLIMATE ACTION (92%); POLITICAL PARTIES (92%); CLIMATE CHANGE (90%); CONSERVATION (90%); EMISSIONS (89%); ENERGY & UTILITY POLICY (78%); NEGATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS (78%); SUSTAINABILITY (78%); CANOEING & KAYAKING (77%); ENVIRONMENTAL TECHNOLOGY INDUSTRY (77%); ENVIRONMENTALISM (77%); NEGATIVE PERSONAL NEWS (77%); TALKS & MEETINGS (77%); AIR QUALITY REGULATION (76%); LAND CONSERVATION (75%); PUBLIC POLICY (75%); APPOINTMENTS (74%); ENVIRONMENTAL TECHNOLOGY (73%); SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (73%); UNITED NATIONS (73%); LEGISLATION (66%); TAXES & TAXATION (64%); COLLEGE & UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS (60%); EMPLOYEE RETRAINING (60%)

Industry: EMISSIONS (89%); ENERGY & UTILITIES (78%); ENERGY & UTILITY POLICY (78%); ENVIRONMENTAL TECHNOLOGY INDUSTRY (77%); FOSSIL FUELS (77%); SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (73%); ALTERNATIVE & RENEWABLE ENERGY (72%); COAL FIRED PLANTS (72%); PLASTICS REGULATION & POLICY (68%); COLLEGE & UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS (60%); FOSSIL FUEL POWER PLANTS (60%); SINGLE USE PLASTICS (54%)

Person: JUSTIN TRUDEAU (79%)

Geographic: OTTAWA, ON, CANADA (74%); MONTREAL, QC, CANADA (72%); NEW YORK, USA (79%); CANADA (94%)

Load-Date: September 27, 2019

End of Document